

Understanding Seraiki movement

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Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif has clarified he had never spoken in favour of Karachi as a separate province. A good and democratic leader never feels the need to retract, amend or contradict his statements. But then this is the quality of a good, humble, wise and by temperament a democratic politician who has a long experience of working by the discipline of his party. In our country how many politicians have been through this rigorous experience? Most of them have been a creation of ruling dictators or they inherit politics and practise it until they can pass the legacy on to their children.

The Punjab chief minister is known for issuing corrections on past occasions, such as when he clarified his remarks about the Taliban.

Similarly, other political actors are not immune to changing their positions. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement has in the years gone by been a supporter of a separate Urdu province, a Jinnahpur as it was called. Of late, however, the MQM has been more eager on sharing power within the existing order. It shared power with Gen Pervez Musharraf and then with the PPP. Along with other partners such as Awami National Party (ANP), which was criticised for its undemocratic handling of the Hazara suba issue, the MQM is today standing with the Zardari government as the PPP presses for a division of Punjab. In this effort, the PPP also has the support of the PML-Q. The unfortunate aspect is that these parties consider theirs to be the last word on any subject. Research can only refine their views.

By raising Karachi, Shahbaz has shown just how expertly he can counter the Seraiki suba, which some others describe as a movement being supported by landlords, tribal chiefs and Khans to reverse the wheel of social development. Shahbaz needed to instead understand what 'Seraiki' stands for.

There are documents available, only if someone has the wish to go through them. Zahoor Ahmad Dhareeja is a great protagonist of Seraiki cause, publisher and editor of Seraiki daily JHOK, Multan and a regular columnist of a Lahore Urdu daily. He has recently published a treatise on Seraiki under the title of Muqaddma Diwan-i-Farid (2010). I reproduce some of his comments. He says:

Translation: Seraiki is one of the oldest languages of the world. (p 27)... So it stands proved that the Seraiki language and civilization was spread over the entire Indus valley... (p 30). This language is spoken from Kasur (Bulleh Shah), Lahore (Madho Lal Husain), Golra, Rawalpindi (Pir Mehr Ali Shah) to Koh-i-Suleman, Bolan Pass, Dhadhar, Kirthar and Hubb in Lasbella... (p 31).

Now particularly about Punjabi he says:

Translation: Shah Husain while sitting in Lahore was composing poetry in Seraiki. At that time Lahores language was Majhi-Doabi. A few centuries back nobody knew the word Punjab and Punjabi. In Mughal period Lahore was made a province and its language was called Lahori. Hindko, the Language of Peshawar, is originally Seraiki. The Pindi language of Potohari is phonetically very close to Seraiki (p 29-30).

What Majhi Doabi and the language of the so-called Takht Lahore is has also been explained by Dhareja.

Translation: The original and the oldest language of this region (Punjab) is Seraiki and its dialect is Majhi or Doabi and the developed form of this dialect is Punjabi the proof of which is the poetry of the great Lahore poet Hazrat Shah Husain (p 18).

In his views Seraiki is the language and whatever is spoken in Lahore, Rawalpindi and Peshawar are its dialects. If this is the case then why do Dr. Jameel Jalibi and many other Urdu scholars assert that Shah Husain, Bulleh Shah, Sultan Bahu and Mehr Ali Shah are

Punjabi poets and why does Mr. Dhareja insist that Bulleh Shah (Kasur) and Shah Murad (Chakwal) are the best Seraiki poets? (p 39)

Then, what is the expanse of Seraiki? If the whole of Punjab is Seraiki speaking then declare it the provincial language and introduce all classical poetry and classical prose of Punjabi in the curriculum and then put the question to the leadership of all provinces since every one of them has two or more languages. Sindh has Sindhi and Urdu, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa has Pushto, Hindko, Seraiki, Pahari, Chitrali etc and Balochistan has Balochi and Pushto which are poles apart plus Brahvi, Jatki or Seraiki and Persian. The fact is, and one is only building here on the basis of Zahoor Dhareja's analysis, that Punjab is the only single-language province out of the four.

There are some other historic facts those wanting to understand the issue might want to know before they propagate their case. For instance the fact that the first ever Seraiki conference was called by the then Sindh chief minister Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi at the behest of Z A Bhutto and in the wake of the poor showing by the PPP in southern Punjab in the 1970 election. So many years later Dhareja, a pioneer of the modern Seraiki movement, has this to say about the developments:

(In the 18th century there were many Seraiki states like Multan, Khairpur, Jhal Magsi, Derajaat and Bahawalpur but no ruler thought that he should adopt Seraiki as its official language (p 36) and... now the position is these Seraiki waderas have not allowed the industry, higher education, communications and other facilities in Seraiki areas... (p 52).

("Some of the waderas and pirs after being insulted by Lahore rulers are now talking of the deprivation of the Seraiki belt"). (p 19)

Let's see where the Gilanis, the Makhdooms, and the rest fit in this scheme. — **Shafqat Tanvir Mirza**

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